



ACCESS CURRENTS

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Tricia Mason

Tricia Mason is Elected Chair of the Access Board

The Board elected public member Tricia Mason chair at its March meeting. Appointed to the Board by President Bush in 2005, Mason serves as a State Government Relations Specialist at Easter Seals in its Office of Public Affairs in Washington, D.C. "I appreciate this opportunity to help lead an organization that plays such an important leadership role in accessible design," Mason noted. "I look forward to the year ahead and the work the Board has underway to advance accessibility on a variety of fronts."

Mason is a former president of the Little People of America, a non-profit organization for individuals of short stature and their families, and serves as its representative to the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) A117 Committee. The ANSI A117 Committee maintains design standards for accessible buildings and facilities. She is originally from Cheyenne, Wyoming where she chaired the Mayor's Council for People with Disabilities. Board chairs serve for a term of one year. Mason succeeds Federal member David L. Bibb, Deputy Administrator of the General Services Administration, who was elected vice chair.

Board Releases Draft Revisions to Guidelines for Buses and Vans

The Board is undertaking a review and update of its ADA Accessibility Guidelines for Transportation Vehicles. Published in 1991, these guidelines cover a range of vehicles, including buses and vans, rail cars, trams, and other modes of public transportation. As part of this effort, the Board has released for public comment draft revisions to sections of the guidelines covering access to buses and vans.

The released draft updates provisions that apply generally to buses and vans and includes revisions that cover new or variant forms of service, such as bus rapid transit. It includes changes to specifications for wheelchair and other mobility aid space requirements, onboard accessible routes, vehicle lifts, ramps, and bridgeplates, signs, stop announcement systems, and lighting. A discussion provided with the draft text describes these changes. In addition, the Board has included questions seeking comment on minimum space requirements for mobility aids, widths of onboard accessible routes, lift design loads, and specifications for seat belts and shoulder harnesses. The deadline for comment is June 11, 2007.

The revisions are based on the Board's review of the guidelines and input it received at an industry roundtable in January and public meetings held last September and July. These events provided an opportunity for the public, including disability groups, transportation operators, vehicle manufacturers, and other interested stakeholders to identify issues to address and provisions to revisit. Recently, the Board held a forum on the released draft and this update effort at New Jersey's TransAction 2007 Transportation Conference and Expo, in Atlantic City and received input on the draft from attendees.

Instructions for submitting comments are included in a notice published in the *Federal Register* on April 11th. Both the draft and the notice are available on the Board's website at www.access-board.gov/vguidedraft.htm. Drafts covering other sections of the vehicle guidelines will be released as they become available. For further information, contact Dennis Cannon at cannon@access-board.gov, (202) 272-0015 (v), or (202) 272-0082 (TTY).

New Online Training Course on Play Area Guidelines Available

A new web-based course on the Board's accessibility guidelines for play areas is now available on the Board's website. The interactive program explains how to apply and follow the guidelines for proper access. It covers the scope and application of the guidelines, including the number of play components required to be accessible, and technical provisions for accessible play equipment, surfacing in play areas, ramp and transfer system access to elevated structures, and access to soft contained play structures. The course covers all sections of the guidelines, which are one of the first of their kind in providing detailed criteria for accessible play areas. In addition, multiple choice exams are provided for each segment of the program. The course is available on the Board's website at www.access-board.gov/play/course/1-0.htm.



Advisory Committee on 508 Standards Refresh to Meet in May

The Telecommunications and Electronic and Information Technology Advisory Committee will hold its next meeting May 22 – 24, 2007 in the D.C. area. The Board created this committee in July to review and recommend changes to its standards for electronic and information technologies which were issued under section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act. The committee will also review the Board's guidelines for telecommunications products covered by section 255 of the Telecommunications Act. The meetings, which are open to the public, will be held at the National Science Foundation (NSF), Room II-555, 4201 Wilson Boulevard in Arlington, Virginia. The agenda will include plenary sessions and meetings of the Committee's eight subcommittees. The meetings are tentatively scheduled to run from 9:00 – 5:00 the first two days and from 9:00 – 3:00 on the last. Persons wishing to attend must pre-register and follow NSF procedures, including its computer security policy. For more information, contact Tim Creagan at creagan@access-board.gov, (202) 272-0016 (v), or (202) 272-0082 (TTY).

Report Issued on Pedestrian Signals at Traffic Roundabouts

European-style intersections configured around a circular isle, commonly referred to as roundabouts, are becoming more popular in the U.S. Studies indicate that they are more efficient in moving traffic and reducing vehicle speeds than standard cross intersections. Roundabouts rely on entering drivers yielding to vehicles on the circular roadway. However, their design and the configuration of pedestrian routes pose challenges to pedestrians with vision impairments. Since they are becoming more common in the U.S., the Board is examining access issues and has helped implement government and industry research through the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Transportation Research Board.

Recently, a report was released from a FHWA project that examined current practices in the U.S. and abroad for signaling roundabouts for vehicular or pedestrian traffic. The report identifies key issues and considerations in signaling roundabouts for greater accessibility, particularly for pedestrians with vision impairments, through a review of research and design practices in other countries, including the United Kingdom, France, the Netherlands, Sweden, and Australia. Potential design strategies and available signal technologies are described in the report, which also identifies additional research needs. The report is posted on the Board's website at www.access-board.gov/research/roundabouts-signals/report.htm.

Workshop Held on Tolerances for Surface Smoothness and Slope

The Board's accessibility guidelines for facilities, including those issued under the Americans with Disabilities Act, recognize conventional industry tolerances for field conditions. The Board receives many inquiries from design, construction, and code professionals on what tolerances are acceptable for a given specification. The Board is sponsoring a project to develop guidance on construction tolerances, particularly those pertaining to the slope, flatness, and smoothness of ground and floor surfaces.

As part of this project, which is being conducted by Architectural Research Consulting, Inc., a workshop was held on March 16th to identify strategies and considerations for developing this guidance. Participants included representatives from various trade associations, professional societies, government agencies, and research organizations. Discussion focused on available measurement protocols for surface flatness, smoothness and slope in relation to construction materials and methods.



Workshop participants discuss factors pertaining to tolerances for surface smoothness and slope.

Papers presented at the workshop addressed design issues, construction considerations, and findings from a study of the physical effects of wheelchair travel over uneven surfaces. Participants identified ways to advance work on establishing appropriate tolerances and measurement protocols and promoting best practices through various trade and professional associations, including the Construction Specifications Institute, the American Institute of Architects, and the American Concrete Institute, among others. This project, while currently focused on exterior routes, including ramps, will also explore tolerances for other types of construction. Additional information on this project is posted on the Board's website at www.access-board.gov/news/tolerances-workshop.htm.



The Board's project includes testing of treated wood chip surfacing at playgrounds and trails.

Board Research Leads to Improved Outdoor Surfacing

Research sponsored by the Board is establishing ways to improve the performance of engineered wood fiber (EWF) as a surfacing material for trails and playgrounds. Completed phases of a multi-year project involved tests of different treatments with the potential to make this "wood chip" material, a popular choice for outdoor surfaces, firmer and more stable for wheelchair traffic. Although final test phases are currently underway, the methods and materials deemed most effective by this research are being used to improve access at various locations, including at an outdoor performance center in the Washington, D.C. area.

Ground and floor surfaces must be firm, stable, and slip resistant in order to be accessible under the Board's accessibility guidelines, including those issued under the Americans with Disabilities Act. While these criteria pose few challenges for indoor surfaces and paved surfaces, they generally preclude many loose materials, such as wood chips, used for outdoor trails and play surfaces unless they are properly treated and maintained. Consequently, the Board initiated research to examine ways to improve the firmness and stability of engineered wood fiber. The project is being conducted by the Department of Agriculture's Forest Products Laboratory in Madison, Wisconsin.

Playgrounds pose a particular challenge to this effort since it is critical that their surfaces be soft enough to cushion falls and reduce injuries. The research project focused on the application of treated engineered wood fiber at play areas to determine which methods are most effective and reliable in improving accessibility and reducing maintenance of the material while preserving its effectiveness as a cushioning surface. *(continued next page)*

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Researchers tested various combinations of materials and commercially available binding agents in a laboratory to determine successful candidates for long-term field testing. Subsequent field tests assessed how top performing stabilizers held up over long-term exposure to the elements, including freeze-thaw cycles, rain, and heat. Two products that performed best in this phase were further tested in a local playground and a state park.

The results indicate that a polyurethane product was most effective in providing an accessible surface that remained adequately impact-absorbent for use in play zones. The phases completed to date also established protocols for preparing and installing treated materials. The final phase of the project, currently underway, involves additional full-scale field assessments at an assortment of playgrounds and trails across the country, including test sites in Wisconsin, New York, Maryland, and California.



Treated EWF improves routes and wheelchair spaces in an outdoor arena at Wolf Trap. Photo by Patrick Spitzer.

The results received to date from the project have been used to improve surfaces at various outdoor sites, including a complex of performance centers at the Wolf Trap National Park for the Performing Arts in Vienna, Virginia. The installation was organized and conducted as an Eagle Scout project by Patrick Spitzer. Using products and installation methods established in the Board's research, Spitzer and his team of volunteers installed stabilized engineered wood fiber to improve the surface of routes and wheelchair seating spaces at an outdoor amphitheater operated by the Wolf Trap Foundation. For further information on the Board's research project, contact Bill Botten at botten@access-board.gov, (202) 272-0014 (v), or (202) 272-0082 (TTY).

Access Currents is a free newsletter issued by the Access Board every other month by mail and e-mail. Send questions or comments to news@access-board.gov or call (800) 872-2253 ext. 0026 (voice) or (800) 993-2822 (TTY). Mailing address: 1331 F Street, N.W., Suite 1000; Washington, D.C. 20004-1111.

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